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ABSTRACT

A collaborative writing process was found to be helpful in the development of literacy learning in a second-grade classroom. Steps of the collaborative writing process evolved through class discussions and included: (1) brainstorming for topics; (2) setting up a folder to collect writing; (3) prewriting; (4) writing; (5) sharing and revising; (6) editing; (7) decision-making; (8) writing the final draft; (9) publishing the book; and (10) celebrating. The students' choice of writing topics made use of their own backgrounds. In collaborative writing, the audience is established from the first thought until the final draft. Students share before they begin to write and throughout the writing process. Children value each person's contribution to the group effort, finding each other's strengths and encouraging one another's attempts at improving their writing. The result is a community of writers who work confidently, finding needed help from 25 writers, not just one teacher. (Author/MG)

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COLLABORATIVE WRITING IN A SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM

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COLLABORATIVE WRITING PROCESS

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The process presented in this article is a collaborative writing process which has been found to be helpful in the development of literacy learning in the classroom. The students' choice of writing topic makes use of the their background. The audience is established from the first thought until the final draft. Students share before they begin to write and throughout the writing process. Children value each person's contribution to the group effort, finding each other's strengths and encouraging one another's attempts at improving their writing. The result is a community of writers who work confidently, finding needed help from twenty-five writers, not just one teacher.

COLLABORATIVE WRITING IN A SECOND GRADE CLASSROOM

When children enter a classroom for the first time, they are individuals, but have no community. Most of the students have no confidence in their own abilities in a new situation, and don't know the strengths of others in their class. Teachers set the tone to establish a classroom community when they look for the particular ways in which each member will be able to contribute to the class.

As students form a writing community, they celebrate each other's accomplishments and value each other's contributions (Hansen, 1987).The class as a whole unit enhances the individuals in the group. Members of the community encourage each other in areas of strength and support each other in areas of weakness. Students internalize that encouragement and support, and become confident in their ability to choose topics and use their writing time wisely.

Helping my second grade students to develop as writers means giving them the time to write and the choice of what to write about. Students need to write daily, choose their topic, find their own voices in their writing, learn to revise, and retain ownership of their writing. Writers revise at different stages of the writing process, and therefore need opportunities to share their writing with their audience before, during, and after their first drafts (Graves, 1983).

My goal this year has been to encourage the writing development of students in my class. I feel revision is essential to this writing development. As students become aware of their audience, and plan to publish for an even larger audience, they begin to revise their writing, striving to make their writing the best that they can make it. Decisions about when to revise and how much to revise are decisions each author makes. However, all writers need to revise in order to improve.

I thought students who select their own writing topics should be excited enough about their writing to share it with a friend, and to revise and edit some pieces for publication. But students in my class seemed reluctant to revise and edit.

At first, I thought more publishing was the answer, the rationale being that when students publish their writing, they see the value in writing, and begin to revise knowing they have an audience. Holding conferences with children often enough to make a difference seemed an overwhelming task. When students brought pieces of their revised and edited writing to our conferences, I saw errors that I knew the students had the ability to correct. For whatever reasons, they had not used strategies of which they were aware. I typed exactly what the student had written, thinking their mistakes would be easier for them to see if the story was in print like the stories they read. I would call students back to the computer to see their writing on the screen, giving them another opportunity to locate errors. Invariably, errors intact, the student would say, "Print it!"

Reluctance on the part of the students to revise and edit was very frustrating for me. I wanted the students to improve, and I felt they needed to look at their writing more than once to accomplish this goal. The problem: how to motivate students to revise and edit, thus encouraging improvement in writing. The solution: a collaborative writing process.

Group Conferencing

I wanted to involve the students with each other, to teach them how to confer with each other and thus create a writing community. Fitzgerald (1989) recommended group thinking conferences, where 4 to 8 students take turns reading their papers aloud. Then, they help each other "become critical readers and better revisers" by asking three questions: What was the piece about? What did you like about the piece? Do you have any comments, questions or suggestions for the author? While I was sure my second graders had the potential, I wasn't sure they had the skills to hold group conferences and really help each other improve their writing. Setting them up to succeed meant I needed to model what I expected. I also wanted to structure the groups in a way that would ensure mutual interest in the other group members' papers. I wanted the students to feel the excitement of an audience right from the first draft. Having a sense of audience is essential for realizing the need to edit and revise. Too often, though, feedback from the audience comes much too late in the writing process. Kenneth and Yetta Goodman

(1983) believe,"Writers must depend on feedback and response from potential readers, which is often quite delayed." Graves (1983) states that revision takes place even before writing has begun. Therefore, for the process of revision to begin, students must have an audience before the first draft is written.

Modeling Whole Class Books

Following Graves' process from Writing: Teachers and Children at Work, I began by modeling a conference with the class. I told the class about a topic I wanted to write about. I told a sketchy story, leaving out details. Then, I asked the students to question me about other details they wanted to know about my story. Their questions conveyed their interest in my story. Following the conference I asked how many would like to read my story when I finished writing. All hands went up. I thanked the students for becoming my audience, and told them how excited I was about writing the story now that I knew they wanted to read it.

I shared my plans for publishing a book with my story. I told the students I would like for all of our writing to be included in the book. We began by sharing our ideas with each other, beginning the collaborative process and creating an audience. I used the same topic (My Favorite Place) as when I had modeled for the students, because I felt it was general enough for all students to write about. I walked them through the process, allowing time to share ideas, write, share, revise,

and edit, all with a partner. The writing was the best the class had ever done! Later, we worked together to publish the book, using a democratic process to decide on the title of the book, color of the pages, the cover design, the table of contents, and binding of the book. Students could "nominate" their ideas, and when all nominations were in, the group voted. The majority ruled. Students were excited about making choices about their book, and the decision-making encouraged a feeling of ownership.

Small Group Publishing - More Collaboration

After the book was published, we brainstormed as a class for new topics. As topics were discussed, some students began to complain: "I don't want to write about that! I want to write about this."

One student asked,"Couldn't we have more than one group going on at a time?"

"I can't be in more than one place at a time!" I said. "Who could lead the groups?"

The students decided that they could lead the groups, and decided that the person who suggested a new topic could become the group leader. To preserve order, one student suggested each group have a "Talking Caterpillar," a piece of braided yarn which would give the person holding it permission to talk in the group. When one person finished talking he or she could hand the "Caterpillar" to another student who wished to speak.

Steps of the Process

After more class discussions were held, resolving more problems, the collaborative writing process evolved and is simply stated below. Here's how it works:

1. Brainstorm for topics

As a whole class, we discuss topics we might use for writing. As a student recommends a topic, I write it on the board, along with his or her name. Then that student asks if there are others who would also like to write on that topic. If there are five, a group is formed. If not, the student may choose to write on the topic for his or her own collection of writing.

2. Set up a folder to collect writing

On the wall there are folders for collecting student writing. The group leader posts the writing topic on a folder which will be set aside for that group to use. The note on the outside is a communication between the group members. When each person has finished writing, he or she signs the outside of the folder. When all members have signed, the leader knows a meeting can be called.

3. Prewrite

The group meets to share their ideas, and tell each other

what they will write about. They ask each other questions and make recommendations for information which the writer may want to include. They usually become excited about each other's ideas. The audience is established at this point because each student is in a self-selected group determined by interest in the topic, and involved in sharing and encouraging each other.

4. Write

Students write their stories. Most students leave the group and move to a personal space for writing, but some write with a partner, sharing at intervals. Some whole groups have collaborated and co-authored their book, working together the entire time.

5. Share and Revise

At a later time, students will meet to share their writing with the group. The group listens as each member reads what they have written. They ask questions to help the writer clarify the ideas and sequence of his or her writing.

6. Edit

Students find their own mistakes, and ask members of the group for help correcting spelling, sentence structure, punctuation, and capitalization.

7. Decision-making

Using the democratic process students vote for the title of the book, color of the pages, cover design, organization of the table of contents, and binding of the book.

8. Final Draft

Students decide whether the book will be typed or handwritten, and sign up for the computer if necessary. With a partner from the group, each student types his or her own paper. Then the group meets to proofread the final draft.

9. Publish the Book

The group leader submits the request to the teacher for paper for the outside cover and the inside pages of the book. Students illustrate their pages and rubber cement their writing to the color of construction paper chosen by the group. The leader also requests graphics or has the cover design created by an illustrator the group has chosen.

10. Celebrate!

In the last meeting,group members read their book together. A library card is placed in the front of the book so that the book may be checked out, and the book is added to the classroom library.

Although students have the option to publish their writing in handwritten form, I encourage them to type their work. There are two reasons: First, I want them to connect their writing with other authors' writing, seeing their own as valuable enough to be in print just like stories they read in books. Second, I want them to publish their books in printed form which will be a finished product, printed just the way it is written.

Student-published books are the most popular ones in our classroom collection. As students reread their books, they find errors they had not previously seen. Sometimes students have grown in their ability to recognize an error, through reading other books and making comparisons. Occasionally a student comes to ask for correction fluid, so a correction can be made. Even when the book is published, students do not stop revising!

Building Community

As the class continues to publish, we look to each other for help, and see each other's worth in the community. We are working together to help make each person's writing the best it can be. Illustrating may also be an area of community building. For example, Maria is a Spanish-speaking student new to our school, and tends to be very shy. She did not choose to be part of the book which was responding to Lafcadio, the Lion Who Shot Back. But the seven writers who were putting their book together had seen her doodling on her papers and had seen her work in art class. No computer graphic was going to be on their front

cover--they wanted Maria to be their illustrator. The group of seven students walked over to her desk and asked her to illustrate their book. She was needed. Quietly she agreed. From that day on, I saw her attitude change in small ways. She began to participate more. She had become a necessary member of the class community. The seven students were right about the illustration, too. She imitated Shel Silverstein's style beautifully.

Where Is The Teacher?

In Writing: Teachers and Children at Work,Donald Graves (1983) recommends organizing the classroom for independence and responsibility. The routines in the classroom must be set up so that children know how to get help if they need it. Procedures in the room should be able to run smoothly without depending on the teacher. One of the most freeing aspects of this organized system for publishing student writing is that my students know how the system works as well as I do. Visitors to my class can interview the students to find out how things work as easily as they can ask me. The children feel confident in their ability to carry on.

So what is my role as a teacher? First,I am a facilitator of groups. I circulate around the room, checking with the group leaders on the progress of each group. I am a writer too, and that means I make choices of writing groups to join. I allow myself the same choice of topics which are available to my

students. I am sometimes a group leader. We still occasionally publish as a class. I am also available to hold conferences with the students. Because we are a community of writers, I can hold conferences without as many interruptions as I used to have.

Only One Component of the Writing Program

This small group writing process is by no means the only writing the students do. The process for publishing a group book takes from two to four weeks. The students are usually working with several groups at different stages of the process, or on one publishing group and several individual pieces of writing during that time it takes to publish a book. Students have an individual writing time followed by writing choice time, when the groups meet. During writing choice time, students may meet with a group, work on a new piece of writing, fix up an old piece, conference with the teacher or a friend, or type a story on the computer. Working on individual pieces of writing with the help of a friend has become popular because of our individual publishing.

Each student has a bound book for collecting his or her own writing. Individuals make their own decisions about what is included in their collection. Some add copies from group publications. Some rewrite stories from their writer's notebook. Some students build on a table of contents as they add stories. Some type all stories, while others have a mixture of typed and handwritten stories. These books are kept in a box in the room so

that they are available during writing choice times.

The collaborative group publishing is an integral part of our writing because the process has several advantages. First, all members are interested in the topic. Second, because they are interested, they are excited to hear others' work and have others hear theirs. Third, an audience is established from the start of the writing process. Fourth, all want to publish a book that they will be proud of, so that they encourage each other, helping with revising and editing. The community of writers that is built is supportive and nurturing, and transforms the teacher's job into a real pleasure. Individuals in the class benefit regardless of ability, because all students are encouraged to develop at their own level and their own pace.

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